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No. 242.

WHY I LOVE MY CHURCH.

By the Rev. J. H. Bocock, Georgetown, D. C.

My church is the old Presbyterian church; rich, through all ages of her history, in divine learning, and in human learning, in deep thought, and in deep faith. She is my church; and with fervent charity, and kind good will towards all other friends of our common Lord, and to the churches into which they are gathered, I confess that I deeply and truly love my own church. I will explain why. If my reasons are good and true, they may awaken the same sacred attachment in other hearts—perhaps in your own, dear reader.

I. I love my church because she honours the Lord Jesus Christ as a divine Saviour; loves, adores, and enthrones him in her heart, as the "only Redeemer of God's elect;" receives him in all his offices as Prophet, Priest, and King; believes in him supremely as the Mediator of the covenant of grace; and owns and acknowledges him, and him only, as the Head of the Church on earth and in heaven.

II. I love my church because, with all her imperfections, such as may cling to the best of earthly things, still, the piety which is in her is true godliness; it humbles, and warms, and cheers the believer's heart; and is produced to quite as great a degree as that in any other church, by the simple action of the divine word on the human heart.

III. I love my church because she owns and calmly

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ntains, among men, the great and glorious doctrines of grace which are taught so clearly in God's word:—see Ephes. i.—Romans viii. ix.—1 Peter i.—which human pride, and the carnal heart so much oppose, though they are so clearly laid down in Scripture, and are so precious to the humble, teachable, and renewed heart.

IV. I love my church because she holds the great doctrines of grace in such manner as that "thereby neither is God represented as the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established;" *Confession of Faith, Chap.* 3, *Sec.* 1; thus maintaining both parts of the revealed truth on this great subject, without undertaking to explain all the difficulties which may grow out of them; but believing and maintaining them with loyal and faithful heart on the authority of the word of God.

V. I love my church because she owns the necessity of a pure, holy, godly life, not conformed to this world. Her ordinary history bears the record, which will be so precious in the light of eternity, that she is willing to sacrifice none of the faithful strictness of the divine word, in order, thereby, to purchase or procure the friendship and support of the sensual, the worldly, the unregenerate, and the unspiritual.

VI. I love my church because she teaches and maintains that the regeneration and renewal of the human heart is effected by the power of the Holy Spirit of God alone, and not by baptism, or any other religious ceremony, human or divine.

VII. I love my church because the prayers which

she offers, are expressions of her present, living desires adorations, thanks, wants, and requests; as unquestionably the prayers of our Lord, and of the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles were; and because she is not bound to take the language of former generations and other ages of mere men, as the sole language of her present worship; but her worship, like her religion, is an incessant living development and utterance of the power of the Divine Spirit in the hearts of her children.

VIII. I love my church because, with all the defects and imperfections of her ministers, who are, as others are, but men, yet she has and has ever had, both a godly and an educated ministry; and has never had, and will not suffer, either a ministry of cold, dead, and worldly learning without godliness; nor a ministry in which piety is connected with ignorance and superstition.

IX. I love my church because she has erected the whole edifice of her most holy and precious faith upon the word of God, and no part of it upon the doctrines or commandments of men. *See Confession of Faith—Form of Government—Chapter* 1. *Section* 1.

X. I love my church because she maintains the principles of true catholicity, as laid down by Paul in the fourteenth chapter of the Romans; not denying the baptism of her sister churches, or the orders of their ministry, because their baptism, or their orders are performed according to their own consciences and not hers.

XI. I love my church because her baptism is by pouring or sprinkling, as it appears that our Saviour's

was; as best shows, by type, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit; as was the baptism of the three thousand at Pentecost; of the Apostle Paul; and the Philippian jailer, and probably others: Luke iii. 21; Acts ii. 41, ix. 18, xvi. 33: and because she maintains with special faithfulness the baptism of the Holy Spirit of God, as the thing exhibited by baptism with water: and makes covenant with God for her children.

XII. I love my church because she steadfastly maintains, and has ever maintained, the pure institutions of the Holy Scriptures, and of the church of Christ in its purest and most uncorrupt ages, that ministers of the gospel should be appointed and ordained to their office by the teaching Elders or Presbyters of the church: as the Apostle Paul was ordained by the teachers at Antioch, Acts xiii. 1;—and as Timothy was ordained "by the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery," 1 Tim. iv. 14. And for which government to be perpetuated, a preparation was made by the apostles and their fellow labourers, when they "ordained Elders or Presbyters in every city:" See Titus i. 15.

XIII. I love my church because she is a truly and thoroughly reformed church, on the model of the holy Scriptures, with no likeness, kindred, or tendency towards the great Antichristian apostasy.

XIV. I love my church because she obeys the Scriptures, in letting no man judge her on the subject of "meats and drinks and holy days," and "ordinances after the commandments and doctrines of men." Col. ii.

XV. I love my church because, in all her history,

she is identified with constitutional liberty, the government of law, and the rights and the duties of man; and has ever been the leader in the great cause of legal liberty in church and state.

XVI. I love my church because she is ordinarily above the littleness of proselytism; and after her zealous advocacy of the truth as she apprehends it, she leaves men to form their church-connections according to their own consciences, in view of that truth.

XVII. I love my church because she is not, and has never been, indifferent to the distinction between truth and error, on any important subject; and because she is as free as it often falls to the lot of earthly things to be, from impurity, from schism, from heresy, from any exclusive assumption, or from the spiritual death of mere form and ceremony.

XVIII. I love my church because she steadfastly believes in, earnestly prays for, and frequently, through the grace of God, richly enjoys, powerful revivals of religion; walking in a happy middle path between wild and dangerous animal excitements on the one hand, and the frozen and dead forms of Pharisaism on the other hand. Thank God for that happy middle way, in which our hearts may be warmed with living fire from God above, and made to glow with the mighty power of the spiritual life, and yet we may diligently preserve the good order and the deep solemnity befitting the house of the Lord.

XIX. I love my church for her solemn and earnest prayers; for her grave and decent good order; for her rich, cheering, and godly psalms and hymns of praise; and for the precious gospel of Christ,

which, with jealous faithfulness, and without corrupt admixtures, she guards, defends, and preaches to the people.

XX. I love my church because she is an elective Republic—holding the official equality of her ministers, according to the words of the Lord Jesus, "One is your master even Christ, and all ye are brethren"—without the power of a religious monarch on the one hand, and without the uncertain caprice of an unchecked majority on the other hand: but with gradation of courts and due rights of appeal.

XXI. I love my church because those found around her standards, are, in general, people of at least as sober judgments, as candid and peaceable spirits, as thinking, inquiring, investigating minds, as others, and reflect in society, so far as their influence goes, fully as much of the light of revealed truth as others.

XXII. I love my church because she is so peculiarly apt to be disliked by the gay infidel, the licentious and ribald sensualist, the ungodly worldling, the dark and dangerous fanatic, and the cold and blank atheist and pantheist.

XXIII. I love my church because her doctrines and her discipline are as old as the holy Scriptures; they were in the hearts and lives of many of God's hidden ones in the ages, when the church was in the wilderness; and when religion had its great revival at the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, these doctrines and this discipline arose from the word of God, where, according to our humble faith, they had ever been.

XXIV. I love my church because, with little or

nothing to attract the world, save the precious gospel of Christ, she has yet been attended by the mighty power of the Spirit of God, during the past twenty years, so as to have doubled the number of her members, having advanced from the one hundred and forty thousand communicants which she had at that time, to the two hundred and eighty thousand members which she has at the present time (1860.)

XXV. I love my church because I can so truly and faithfully love her, in accordance with the foregoing devout profession, and in strict accordance with her own principles, and yet preserve the unity of the Spirit, the bond of peace, fervent charity, and communion in their gifts, graces, and sacraments, with all that in every place call with true faith upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.

XXVI. I love my church because she heartily accepts the Redeemer's great parting commandment: Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature; because she is, and has been, among the foremost of the tribes of his people, in seeking to spread among men every where, the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus; and because she is blessed with the possession of as complete an equipment, perhaps with a more complete equipment, for the missionary work of the bright coming ages, than most other churches. She is thoroughly equipped with Schools, Colleges, and Theological Seminaries for the training of her sons and daughters for his service. She is thoroughly equipped with her Missionary, Education, Publication, and Church Extension Agencies, for the

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actual execution of the Missionary work. And she is thoroughly equipped with her Presbyteries, Synods, and General Assembly, to administer the government of the Church on earth, under her great Head in heaven; and to maintain right, liberty, and purity; as she has ever been blessed with the divine grace to incline and enable her to do.

XXVII. I love my church because she is a branch of the Holy Catholic Church in the purest and truest sense of the words. Her members are grafted into the body of Christ, not merely by the appointed ceremony which is the sign and seal of engrafting, but is utterly vain and empty when alone; but also by the Holy Spirit of God, who alone can bestow on any soul, real communion in the true Catholic Church. And I love her because that true Holy Catholic Church of which she is a branch, is distinguished from the world by the work of the Spirit upon the hearts of men, and not by genealogies and successions of men without the Spirit of God. And I love her because proof is constantly accumulating everywhere, in the providence of God, that her consistent members meet with abundant acceptance and salvation from the Lord.

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